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IRAQ: Its Conflict with Iran

- I. Issued Alert Memo because gradual escalation of border clashes & move. Iraqi troops make expanded conflict distinct possibility
- II. Iraq has strong motives for wanting to recover territory and intimidate Iran
 - A. Never happy with 1975 accord with Shah, which forced to accept to halt Shah's aid to rebellious Iraqi Kurds
 - B. Worried about Iran's efforts to export its brand of religious revolution to Iraq's predominantly Shia population and other Shias in Gulf
 - C. Worried about vulnerability of its oil facilities -- attractive, easy targets for Iranian sabotage
 - D. On positive side, Iran weaker now than ever has been or will be again -- Iraqi's territorial aspirations logically should be pursued now
 - E. Want to enhance image as predominant power in Gulf and chasten traditional contender for that position: Iran
 1. land dispute includes not only Iraqi-claimed territory but small islands claimed by UAE; recovery of these would win Iraq great credit among Gulf states and other Arabs
- III. Iraq faces some serious constraints on significantly widening the conflict
 - A. Do not want to overtax national loyalties of predominantly Shia military given religious bond between Iraqi and Iranian Shia (latest report implies national ties prevailing)
 - B. A widened conflict could jeopardize oil exports and thus revenues

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- C. Escalation risks undeterminable point at which superpower involvement is a distinct possibility
- D. Uncertain whether arms supply relationship with Soviets would withstand open conflict with Iran

IV. Relations between Iraq & Sovs. cool, correct

- A. Economic and political ties are very weak; arms relationship is key pillar
 - 1. relations have only slightly improved since all time low following Sov. invasion of Afghanistan
- B. Soviets have taken relatively even hand in public statements on border clashes
 - 1. Iraqis probably do not see Soviet tilt toward Iran
 - 2. Moreover, arms deliveries to Iraq thus far proceeding apace
- C. Our judgment that Soviets not anxious to see conflict widened and would act as arbitrator if it did; probably try to arrange ceasefire
 - 1. Sovs do not want jeopardize relations with Iraq, the predominant power in area, for unknown future with weak Iran
 - 2. Prefer to contain friction and might try to manipulate arms supplies to Iraq to get it to desist
 - 3. Sovs clearly have hands full elsewhere
 - 4. Sovs might also worry that major hostilities would force Iran to resolve differences with US in order to turn attention to Iraqi threat

In sum, Soviets probably see no clear gains to them in greater conflict and potential loss of equities in both Iran and Iraq, given that situation could evolve to point where their leverage -- short of direct intervention -- not sufficient to shape situation to their advantage.

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- V. Iraq is clearly the superior military power and would have significant advantage in open conflict
- A. Should the struggle become protracted, however, political factors could come into play and could diminish that advantage.
1. slowdown of Soviet arms supply
 2. uncertainty commitment of Shias in military could cause tactical constraints
 3. domestic dissidents taking advantage of situation
- B. Moreover, we do not think Iraq has developed any plan for prolonged struggle

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